

ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE UNDERWORLD

An Experience in the Santé Prison

ROBERT MISRAHI

The first sign of a knowledge in birth is the desire to die. This life seems unbearable, another inaccessible. One is no longer ashamed of wanting to die; one wishes to be transferred from the cell one detests to a new cell which one will learn to detest.

Franz Kafka (*Diaries*)

WE WERE arrested in a little hotel in the Latin Quarter after the proprietor had phoned the police; one of us was twenty and another twenty-one years old. Three others, seventeen and under, were released the next day.

The night of our arrest, the policemen around the police station took us for youthful gangsters or riotous students. But they soon found out about our political activity and became curious about us. Obviously no one knew anything about the Palestinian business, and they all regarded us as fanatics or playboys. Most of the time we just smiled; we kept up our pride, certain in any case of being in the right; this attitude may have saved us from the hostility of the policemen; perhaps it actually aroused their interest.

We soon began to talk. The policemen, and especially the sergeants, couldn't see

why our consciences were so clear. We tried to explain that it was temporarily necessary to break certain laws in order to establish just laws where there were none; but they replied by bringing up "the Jewish problem." A sergeant explained in a tone of solemn indignation that "the Jews stick together," that they exploit the countries in which they settle, that everywhere and always they take the "best places." Someone remarked that the Jews "never work with their hands."

There was an Arab peddler, under arrest for twenty-four hours. From time to time he excitedly gave his opinion: in Algeria the population was exploited by a few Jews who monopolized practically all business; and "the Jews won't cooperate, no, you can't get anything out of them." One of my friends spoke of the "new Jew" of the future, and of the "ideal." Little by little the policemen moved away from our bench, but only after the sergeant remarked that he had good friends who were Jews, but "they were not like the others."

The whole day passed in comings and goings between the police station and the Commissariat, which was situated in a different street. The commissioner and the inspectors were affable and confused; they wished to dispose of our case as quickly as possible and regretted that no one at the Judiciary Police or elsewhere was willing to assume responsibility. They regretted having to meddle in our affairs, they strictly abstained from passing judgment on us, but they were obliged to take cognizance of a simple legal violation and to act accordingly. They respected our "intelligence" and our opinions; as for our aims, they couldn't say. They questioned us politely and expressed the hope that everything would be settled that same day: we would be transferred to the Dépôt (Police Prison) and our case would be up to the deputy prosecutor.

ROBERT MISRAHI, who was a young member of the Stern Group in Paris, was arrested in May 1947 for the illegal possession of arms, and spent several months in Paris's Santé Prison. He here describes his experiences during that stay. Mr. Misrahi was born in Paris in 1926, and is a graduate of the Sorbonne. He became connected with the Stern Group in 1946, and his arrest grew out of a series of secret meetings involving both political activities and instruction in the use of arms. This description of his experiences in the Santé was first published in the French monthly *Les Temps Modernes*. It has been translated from the French by Ralph Manheim. Mr. Misrahi's story "The Badge" appeared in the April 1949 COMMENTARY.

AT ELEVEN that night we were indeed transferred to the Dépôt. In the police wagon we were mixed in with thugs and vagrants. No one noticed us then or when we were searched at the Dépôt. They treated us exactly like ordinary criminals, that is, with mechanical indifference. We passed a night and a day in a "transient" cell. We told our story, in particular we gathered information about the administrative process and the probable future of each of us. We went unnoticed. About eleven o'clock in the morning we were taken up to be photographed and fingerprinted and to fill out forms.

Bored clerks, prisoners who looked like conventional bandits: three-day beards, clothes in rags, no tie. Some of them, especially two Jewish brothers who spoke Yiddish to us, looked like real thugs. To each other, they spoke French with the accent of the Pigalle toughs. They listened with boredom to our story and quickly moved away from us. In the fingerprinting department the clerk was Jewish. He was astonished to see that on my form I had put down "Jewish" under "race." He looked around and spoke to me in an undertone. Race, he told me, was for the black and yellow races, not for the Jews; he was a Frenchman and so was I. He had been there a long time and what he told me was not a declaration of principle, he was just telling me how to get along, giving me a sound piece of advice. He particularly insisted that it was to my interest to hold my tongue. "When you get to the Santé, don't trust anybody."

That night we reported to the deputy prosecutor. He told us that the facts were clear; and that, without wishing to judge the political significance of our action, he was obliged to hand us over to an examining magistrate. Meanwhile we were to be sent to the Santé.

About nine o'clock we were transferred to the prison in a police wagon. After the formalities of admission I was separated from my friend, who was assigned to the division of minors. Up to our liberation I was to see him again only once, in the examining magistrate's office. So I was alone and naturally I took a certain interest in my new companions. But I remembered the advice of the Jew at the Dépôt.

When they shut me up for the night in a little temporary cell, I did my best to find a prudent answer to the classical question: "What you in for?" With my looks I couldn't very well say: "For pimping," or "For burglary." So I only remarked that they had "found some pamphlets."

This aroused interest and a tall chap who must have been just about twenty-five suggested: "Pamphlets? Big Charley?" I gave him a baffled look. "Sure . . . Maurras," he said. I answered vaguely that it wasn't exactly that and besides it didn't matter. The one who had questioned me "was in" for theft. Next I was taken over by a pimp, indifferent to politics, who, when he learned that I was "white" (no prison record), assured me I'd get off with a suspended sentence.

In this temporary cell there was a tall, dried-out man of fifty-five or sixty. A "repeater." He had listened to the conversation I had just had in the prison corridor. He didn't speak to me but I could hear him discussing me with other prisoners. In an undertone he described me as a "political" and seemed very eager to know whether I was Right or Left. . . . "We've got to find out what party. . . the Communists are out to get us." He made himself comfortable on the bench beside me and, in a tone of prison solidarity, asked me if I had room enough. But in the general conversation, he spoke only to the others. That night I hardly spoke.

THE following morning was spent in formalities: showers, examination of belongings, etc. Then we were sent to our regular cells. There was an enormous contrast between the filth, crowding, disrepair, and stench of the places I had seen up till then, and my new cell; when I entered and the door closed behind me, I was struck by the white skins, shaven faces, clean shirts, and general order. Everything had a settled look. I don't wish to describe my impressions, but this is necessary for an understanding of my subsequent attitude, which was inspired by a sudden feeling of confidence. This place gave you a sense of "being at home"; you felt you could "live" here more or less.

Most of the prisoners were young, from twenty-four to thirty; only one was in his

fifties. When I went in, I sat down on the one bed, surrounded by the six inmates. This was a standard prison scene: a new prisoner enters; he immediately affects the atmosphere; a tissue of habits had been formed, and perhaps he will upset the relations among old inmates and disturb their whole mode of life; his arrival is an event, and the curiosity he arouses is not disinterested. The others are "interested" in him as in someone with whom they will have to live day and night for an indeterminate period. Behind an attitude of mutual helpfulness that is both sincere and affected, both sides try to feel each other out. Without hesitation they gave me soap, towel, food, and even, very circumspectly, razor blades. This last amounted to a great show of confidence. Their friendliness made me forget the Jew at the Dépôt. I vaguely told them my story and listened attentively to their stories.

WHEN they heard I was a Jew, they spoke more and more of the Jewish problem in France. And little by little, with smiles that were both self-satisfied and embarrassed, they revealed the reasons for their arrest. One of them had obviously established his leadership. He used argot rather sparingly and spoke French almost without accent; sitting beside me on the bed, he directed the conversation. He started on the Jewish problem, making an effort to speak objectively, as an intellectual. He wished to show what he thought of the Jews and at the same time to make it clear that he had the necessary qualities for taking the lead in any conversation. He was obviously trying to impress me. I must have mentioned my college degrees* to him, and several times he said that "apaches don't have to run around in a cap and scarf, some of them have their degrees." He told me that the Jews stuck together, that they didn't work with their hands, that they exploited any country in which they could entrench themselves. "Let the Jews have Palestine. Good. But then, not

* Friends of mine who were neither Jews nor anti-Semites have reproached me for being arrogant in the first two cells and cowardly in the third. Perhaps they are right. But who is to blame? Whatever he does, a Jew, in the presence of others, will always be cowardly or arrogant.

a single Yid in France." The speaker was a professional burglar.

"I admit, I have no love for them, but I'm not the only one. . . . Jean" (he pointed out a big fellow of twenty-four or twenty-five, blond and handsome) "is here on account of the Jews. . . ."

"On account of the Jews?"

"Yes, I swiped some furniture off a Jew. . . . He beat it during the war, I needed money Now he's in America, he sent some kike woman to put the law on me."

It was now lunchtime; they pooled their provisions and shared them. They gave me a portion equal to the others, saying that in prison there was no such thing as a Jew or an Aryan.

"You don't know Hans?"

"Hans?"

A big brawny individual looked at me with a smile. He was a German prisoner who had escaped from a camp and had been caught. All his cellmates were indignant that a prisoner of war should be treated like this. I was told that he didn't like Jews either. Now it was time for our siesta.

The man of fifty who was there for black-marketing sugar arranged to be next to me. Secretly, he passed me a slip of paper on which he had written: "Don't take it to heart. Be careful."

Toward the end of the day, I became acquainted with the Arab. His name was Marcel, he was from Algiers, but he spoke French without an accent. He was in for stealing. He spoke cordially like the others, and like them he made no bones about his opinions: in North Africa you'd only need to arm the Arabs and they'd "settle the hash" of all the Jews; an understanding between Jews and Arabs was impossible.

The evening and night were uneventful. The next day I learned that the "big shot"—the unofficial leader of the group—was a Breton autonomist and dying for De Gaulle to take power. He felt that it was only a question of weeks, of days perhaps. The whole prison was in a state of excitement. In the corridors and through the windows, everyone was talking civil war and *coup d'état*. Bob (the Breton autonomist) said he knew the General's muscle men, and told me if I was smart I'd leave France as soon as possible. "The Yids and the Communists, you know. . . ."

THAT night in the dark the conversation turned to civil war, the next war, the Jewish and Communist peril. The sugar broker said nothing but all the others denounced the Judeo-Bolshevik menace, suggesting radical methods of combating it. The conversation dragged on and on. The "big shot" explained his principles and boasted that in the next war he would not only be able to keep out of danger but would manage to "feather his nest nicely." It must have been about 1:30 AM. I was exasperated both by what they were saying and by the noise. Several times I asked them to lower their voices a little, but I took no part in the conversation. They didn't answer but just made a little more noise. Finally Jean (the one who had stolen the furniture) shouted at me: "—— you!"

By his tone he advised me to make myself inconspicuous. The conversation doubled in intensity. Stubbornly, I protested once more very loudly, remarking that the reasons for their behavior were only too clear. At this moment the guard came by on his rounds, turned on the light from outside, and looked through the peephole. There was complete silence. Then the guard turned out the light, and the sound of his steps died away in the corridor.

I suddenly realized that they would take me for a stool pigeon, and perhaps I had raised my voice on purpose. They kept on discussing until morning without the slightest pause.

After "coffee" we began to pile up the blankets and mattresses. I didn't say a word and they didn't address me. I sat down at the table to write my letters.

At this moment Bob took Hans into a corner, whispered something, then looked over toward me: "Didn't you say you wanted to get him, Hans?"

The German came up to me, told me to defend myself, and knocked me out with two or three punches. The difference in our weight, size, and strength made it impossible for me to react. It all happened pretty quickly, but I had time to hear the German saying: "Dirty Jew, dirty Jew." At that moment I bumped into Jean and he told me not to touch him. The sugar broker said that was enough, but the Arab answered that there was no need of having fine sentiments about characters like me.

It was Bob who gave Hans the order to stop. I regained consciousness a few minutes later, sitting on a mattress.

They spoke of me in the third person and acted as if I wasn't there. Bob climbed up to the window and—falling back into argot—told the story to the next cell.

"We fed the guy, we loaned him everything we had, we did everything for him. We tried to get along with him, but with them, it don't matter what you do. A kike is always a kike."

From that day on I had only my blanket stretched out on the bare floor, in a corner, and my mess gear, "the Jew's mess gear." Sometimes the sugar broker gave me a look of sympathy. The next day Bob notified me that they were going to give me pen and ink to write a request for transfer to another cell. For several days I lived among them without speaking or being spoken to; every second morning we separated for a ten-minute "promenade" (in a large uncovered cell in the courtyard). Then I mingled with the inmates of the other cells, but I didn't speak.

One day, however, Bob beckoned me over to him and showed a page in a book he was reading: the passage dealt with the moral "nobility" and its distinctions of rank. "You see, it's what I was saying the other day. . . ."

All the contempt he exhibited toward me did not prevent him from wanting to prove to me, when the occasion permitted, that he was capable of criticizing and discussing an idea, of appreciating a book, of adopting a point of view. Sometimes he would silently pace the cell, with an air of absorption: "Leave me be, sometimes a man needs to reflect, to meditate."

One morning I was informed that I was being transferred to another cell. Bob told me that he could communicate with any cell he wished and that I'd better keep my mouth shut about the newspapers, razor blades, etc.

THE door of the new cell closed behind me. I tried to evade questions. But I had an identification paper, showing the charge against me and my change of cell. I had no need to show it to them right away, but it was possible that they might see it accidentally. Besides, I had to post

my name on the door for visits, letters, packages, etc. So little by little I explained that I was a Jew, that my former cellmates, who were anti-Semites, had taken me, or pretended to, for a stool pigeon, and had beaten me.

One of them, Paul, turned to me with a smile in which there was both embarrassment and self-assurance. He had been found guilty of armed assault; I soon learned (when he spoke of the absolution for his sins that God would not fail to grant him) that he was a Catholic; he was reading at the moment *Le juif errant est arrivé* ("The Wandering Jew Has Arrived"), for "documentation," he said. When he learned that I was a student, he made it clear that he had almost been graduated from secondary school but had been thwarted by circumstances. René (pimp, burglar, guilty of impersonating a policeman, bar-keeper at Belleville) said that he "didn't give a —," there were neither Jews nor Aryans, it was only the "mentality" that counted. Paul, the leader of the group, was more explicit:

"Take me, for instance, I don't like the Jews. But I think it's disgusting to hit a guy who can't defend himself, and especially to get a Boche to do the job."

The others remained more or less silent, listening with curiosity as I told them what I could about the reasons for my arrest. René asked me where it all got me.

On another occasion he told me how he had robbed a wealthy Jewish tailor, not because he was a Jew, but because "they've always got more than other people." At the same time a young automobile thief told us how clever he had been during the occupation: he would approach Jews who wished to pass the demarcation line and promise to escort them to Tours by train and from there take them on in a car; he would collect half his fee in advance and then disappear.

One morning when we returned from the "promenade," René told us that my former cellmates had spoken of me. He took a protective attitude.

"I asked them what you had done. They couldn't say a thing, so it's all right, I told them to mind their own business. . . . Did you have to tell them you were a Jew?"

Though I tried to avoid political dis-

cussions they became more and more frequent, and stupidly I told my companions more or less what I thought. They were all Gaullists except one receiver of stolen goods, a kind of neurasthenic who had spent eight years in an asylum and never spoke about anything but his ruined life and suicide. They were all anti-Communists; with passion and gusto they described in detail the only methods that would create order in Palestine or later in a Gaullist France. Paul, the "big shot," who didn't consider me "like the others," said:

"The Jews and the Communists, we'll cook them all; you'd better pack up and leave if De Gaulle takes power."

That was also the opinion of Jacques; he had enlisted in the Corps d'Afrique, had joined Giraud and then De Gaulle. He had fought up to the campaign of Alsace and had been in the army of occupation. Demobilized, and unwilling to sweat for Renault, he had specialized in burglarizing stores. He was a "patriot," as Paul said, and the two of them got along very well. The pimp reproached him for his devotion to France and De Gaulle: a member of the underworld ought to steer clear of all society, including France. "We're like the Jews," he said. "We're outside the law and we stick together."

I spent my days reading and working, sitting on a pallet at the only table. I studied Hegel and worked on a story in which I attempted to describe my relations with my former cellmates. The others kept asking me what I was writing and what Hegel "talked about." Of course I refused to explain my story, and as for the German author, I tried to tell them what philosophy was. They listened, made me keep on talking, then concluded: "That's all bunk."

ONE day the next cell lent me the works of Racine. The book lay around without anyone touching it, then I began to reread *Phèdre* and jot down a few verses. The automobile thief (twenty-eight years old, very youthful looking, and lively) asked me to "explain" Racine to him and reminded me that they were all perfectly capable of understanding anything I said. Not knowing whether he was sincere or wanted to make a fool of me, I hesitated and finally said nothing.

"You're a phony student; if you can't talk about Racine, you're no good, you're no more a student than I am."

Next day the book disappeared.

Some time afterward, the pimp asked me about love. He didn't smile and seemed interested. We chatted for about an hour, then: "Hell, you bore me. Love is to — and then go pick up the dough. You don't need philosophy to tell you that."

"That's one point of view. . . ."

"Oh no, my friend. You always think you're smarter than everybody else, you think some things are just reserved for you."

Gradually the situation became clearer.

Sometimes René took letters for me that he had his lawyer mail; he began to intimate to me that I mustn't abuse this privilege, that the lawyer incurred risks, and that besides he couldn't serve everybody. Since each prisoner was allowed only a limited number of letters, I tried to write in the name of the neurasthenic, who didn't use his turn; they let me write my letter, but when it came time to deposit it in the window, Jacques said to me: "I've got to write too, it's urgent, my letter is all ready."

He had force on his side. I withdrew my letter. Three days later, I tried again to send a letter by the same system. Jacques let me write the letter, then he said: "I've got to write, it's urgent."

In the morning I had seen him slip a letter to René who was expecting his lawyer. Moreover, he had written the day before in his own name; I called this to his attention. He answered that he had no need to discuss the matter with me.

THAT night the conversation turned to the "right guys," who "lay down the law in prison," and the others, "the intruders here in stir where we're at home." René had started the discussion. The others agreed warmly. Then René tried to use the faucet and found it stuck.

"That doesn't surprise me," he cried. I had been the last to use it.

Before we went to sleep, he made various other pointed remarks. Several days before, he had remarked to me that I deserved to be beaten for some of the things I said. He wanted an argument and I gave him one; it was brief and violent (but neither that night nor on the follow-

ing days did anyone strike me). I thought I was dealing only with René.

The next morning no one spoke to me. Thereafter, we exchanged only a few words about our collective tasks (cleaning the cell, etc.); finally, one day when the silence had been even heavier and I had not received the letters I was expecting, I refused my share of René's package. He made it clear to the others that they had to choose between him and me: from that time on, they strictly carried out orders, and I was ostracized completely.

The day after that in the corridor, one of the inmates of my cell (a sailor sentenced for theft) came up to me, took me by the shoulder, and quickly whispered:

"They have a putrid mentality; they're putting you in quarantine. I'll do you any little favors I can, like getting you matches or stamps. Try to lay low, don't say anything and be patient."

From then on I had nothing to do with the others. We merely lived side by side in the same cell. I continued to study Hegel and I finished my story (poor, I must admit, but it was the only way I could use my time). In any case, I worked all day and managed perfectly well without the others. Then something new happened.

ONE day Paul, the "big shot," began very ostentatiously to read Racine; this was the book that had vanished while I was reading it. Jacques took to drawing pictures of women to decorate the cell, something he had never done before. Another started writing verses to familiar tunes. Joe, the neurasthenic, remembered some poetry he had written in the asylum. But the silence between them and me remained unbroken. The others pretended to be unaware of my existence or of anything I did. I took my turn at work along with the others, cleaning the cell and piling up blankets and pallets. René often told the story of the Arab newcomer who had been made to sleep on the bare floor next to the toilet, and to clean the cell every day; or sometimes it was the story of a consumptive who had been refused a pallet or extra blankets. I was obliged to feel that I was privileged, since after all I slept on a pallet, beside Joe, and I was allowed to hang up my clothes on a nail. (These material details had their im-

portance, since they characterized the relations among inmates.)

One morning when I came back from a conference with my lawyer, I found everything changed. My books, papers, underwear, clothes, were all piled up on the floor in a corner. My cellmates were silent and seemed to be expecting something. They didn't look at me. I lost countenance a little and was unable to keep silence; I asked if anything new had happened.

"No, everything's the same."

I began to put my papers in order: my notes on Hegel and the manuscript of my story had disappeared.

"You didn't run across some loose papers? They may have got lost. . . ."

"Kind of a rough draft?"

"Yes."

"We used it to burn the bedbugs. . . . We began to read it, but we didn't read the whole thing. Anything you say about the other cell is our business too."

"But—"

"I don't want any discussion with you. You better ask to be moved again. That's my advice to you. Meanwhile stay in your corner and take care what you write."

(I must add that my story was entirely about Jews and anti-Semites.)

It was not René who spoke; he took an air of indifference, as if he wanted to keep out of things; Paul, the "big shot," didn't say anything either, but just "supervised." Jacques was the spokesman; the neurasthenic was the same as ever, lying silent and absent on his pallet. The sailor didn't take his eyes off me, and his face seemed more somber and flushed than usual. He didn't say anything either.

Next day at exercise, Joe, the "madman," came up to me.

"Before you came, it was me. I was the 'nut.' They never let me alone all day, I was their toy. When you're gone, it'll be somebody else. Don't take it to heart. . . ."

Some days passed. I was no longer able to use the table and the pallets, so I spread out a blanket in the door niche; there were two little windows opposite and it was here that I had the most light. But only the doorway remained free, the rest of the space was occupied by their clothes. When they had to go out for their packages or to see their lawyers, some of them trampled my blanket

like a doormat, the others stepped over it. I regarded this as a kind of test: Joe and the sailor stepped over it, so did René; the others trampled.

They didn't speak of me any more. But among themselves they spoke a good deal about Yids and kikes. Paul said to me one day:

"This business of yours is dragging out. If the underlings don't want to move you, better apply to the director. That's my advice to you, something might happen to you."

There had been no incident. It was just my presence.

I HAD my lawyer hurry things up and soon I was transferred to another cell.

The first time I had stayed in the same building and division; this time the assistant director had personally attended to my transfer, and had sent me to another division, situated in a different wing of the building. Thinking I was far away from my old cell, I decided to cover up.

First I tried to pass for a plain arms smuggler. After all, wasn't I in with the "common prisoners" and not the "politicals"? My story was that "I needed money to finish my studies." My new cellmates were: a Russian dope addict, a former czarist officer; an employee of the P.T.T. (Post, Telegraph, Telephone), crook, former sailor, captain in the Resistance (of this he informed us only much later, when there were only three of us left in the cell); a young pimp of twenty-two who attacked old ladies in their villas; a deserter who had previously fought with the Resistance in the Vercors. Finally, a cabinetmaker sentenced to eighteen months for performing an abortion.

The Russian Vladimir, the postal employee Henri, the pimp "Milo," soon noticed that I was not what I claimed to be. For some time our life went along quite normally, except that every day they tried to find out more about me. There was my name, and after a while they found out about my transfers. To account for my Oriental-sounding name, I told them I was Spanish, of Arab origin.

"You must be a Yid," said Milo, the pimp.

The Russian soon came to the same conclusion. When I received mail, Vladimir asked me if "her" name was Esther or

Rachel. I clung to my Hispano-Arab origin; this gave Henri (the resister) the idea that I had fought in Spain (whether for Franco or the Republic he never let on), and he tried to start political discussions.

As for my transfers, I intimated that they had been due to the advances of some pederasts. I got this idea from the various stories about fairies that Henri (who had been a sailor) and the pimp had told. Emile the cabinetmaker rose to my defense and described how he would have reacted under the same circumstances. Milo began to make jokes about my girlish eyes and slender waist. Often he said to me:

"You're cute, you know."

He playfully examined me from every side, propositioning me, but not seriously. Then one day when I was taking a shower:

"Didn't I tell you you were a Yid? What are you afraid of?"

Henri agreed: "The Boches aren't here any more, there are no more anti-Semites, why do you hide it? Anyway, if you ever have any trouble, I'm here. . . ."

One day this same Henri, with whom I got along best, decided that since I was circumcised, there must be some connection between me and a news item he had read about some students being arrested in the Latin Quarter. He tried to reconstruct the story, telling me that if I was the one he thought, he was glad to know me, that I was right in doing what I did, etc. (I didn't know at the time that he had been in the Resistance.)

The Russian and the deserter (an Alsatian) began to make disparaging remarks about students in general, or, on the contrary, to point out the difference between an authentic student and myself. Vladimir started conversations on learned subjects, loudly but courteously expressing his surprise at the gaps in my knowledge. For instance, when I didn't know the date at which the prison of La Santé was built, he would say:

"What, Monsieur Jacques, you don't know? For a *licencié* that's not very impressive. I had thought better of you."

"All their knowledge is hot air," said Marcel, the Alsatian. "I had students with me in the Vercors, they had a lot of ideas about strategy. They have all sorts of suggestions, but when it comes to putting them

into practice, it's a joke. Zero. Anything practical is just too much for you. Take those guys, you had to laugh; they never stopped blowing off, but when it came to getting them out on patrol, you had to drag them."

On other occasions the Russian steered the conversation toward the situation in Palestine. He would say: "You must know a lot about that problem, Monsieur Jacques. A *licencié*. . . ."

I had made up my mind not to understand what he was driving at, but I was obliged to say a few words about the problem so as not to seem to be avoiding it. Then Henri noticed that in speaking of the Jews, I let slip "we" instead of "they." My denials were in vain. Vladimir said nothing, but gloated.

One day he spoke of Marxism and even more of Marx.

"He was a dangerous character. Like all philosophers. You must have noticed that all revolutions have been provoked by them. A healthy state should prohibit the teaching and practice of philosophy, and that goes for you, Monsieur Jacques; you're harmful to society, and prison doesn't do you any harm. I have a great deal of sympathy for you, but philosophers are a dangerous race."

"I'd send them to the mines, I would," said Marcel. "Prison is nothing, it's the mines those students need. I'd teach them. They'd learn how to march in step. . . ."

ONE day Marcel asked me to lend him my Bible. He was a Catholic and had never read it. He asked me who had written the Old Testament. (None of the Catholics I met in prison knew.) I didn't answer, but the Russian smiled.

"It's for cultural reasons that you read the Bible, isn't it, Monsieur Jacques? You're not a believer?"

For some time I lived a normal prison life, spending my time studying and discussing. I was prudent in my relations with Marcel and Vladimir.

One day, Emile went to the Palace of Justice for his trial. When he came back that evening, we all expressed our indignation at his sentence. Then he told me, very curtly, that M., whom he had met in a cell at the Palace of Justice, sent me his regards. I didn't go into the matter, because he was very downcast. But I suspected something

out of the ordinary, since there was no reason why M. should be called to the examining magistrate, unless I were too.

The next day Emile had regained his usual spirits, and was already joking about his eighteen months: "We'll make it, M'sieur le Président." I tried to find out more about M. Everyone else was listening, but that didn't matter, the cabinetmaker would have spoken to them in my absence.

The truth of the matter was that Emile had not met M., but one of my former cell-mates, who had spoken of a little dark-haired fellow, a Jew, etc., and Emile had recognized me; it was clear that he had heard more than he would say. Just then Henri remembered that M. was one of the names he had read in the paper. So I was the person he had thought.

The Russian stood up and said ironically:

"You are a very interesting case, Monsieur Jacques. Didn't I tell you you were dangerous? But I'm delighted to know you just the same."

He was obviously proud at having "known all along" who I was. (The next day he spoke to me at length of certain Jewish sects in the Caucasus, who didn't believe in the Talmud but only in the Torah.)

"I told you he was a Yid," said Milo. "You were mistaken, you know," he turned to me, "my brother-in-law's a Jew. You've nothing to be afraid of."

"That's right, kid" (Henri was thirty-two). "I suspected something all along, but I still don't see why you didn't tell us right away. There are no anti-Semites here."

Marcel had left us and said nothing. Emile seemed rather annoyed at having inspired all these declarations of sympathy.

"I didn't mean to say anything, you've got a right to hide anything you like, but you're the one who asked the questions. And anyway, I don't see why. . . ."

Now I had to keep them from being offended at my distrust. (Why, what did you take us for? Barbarians?)

I explained to them vaguely that I had been made suspicious in spite of myself, that I hadn't known them at first, but that now I saw I had nothing to fear from them, and that in any case, I begged them to keep the matter to themselves and not to say anything to the other cells in the division. I particularly harped on the confidence that

I placed in them. Thus I hoped they would make it a point of honor to "keep the secret," and that in spite of themselves they would feel bound by a certain obligation in their future conduct toward me.

Night fell. We were all standing in the middle of the cell, they all encouraged me, made promises, etc.

THE next day Vladimir began to talk about Jewish politicians; he told me that my future was assured, that I had maneuvered well, that he felt sure I had no financial worries. All of them, except perhaps Henri, agreed.

Marcel often spoke in the same tone: "What worries can a man have at twenty-two? They make me laugh, kids talking about worries. All you students are either sissies or liars."

Very politely, Vladimir told me why the Jews were both dangerous and contemptible. No manual work, always the best jobs, plenty of money . . . and that revolutionary spirit which explained why all the disorder in the world had been created by Jews. "Imprisonment, you know. . . ."

"I'd send all of them to the mines," said Marcel.

From that day on Vladimir and Marcel began more and more to criticize and disparage everything I did.

Then Vladimir's term was finished and he left. One night Emile got very excited and told us that "well, I don't believe" those stories about concentration camps, crematoriums, millions of corpses. People had seen a few documentary films, heard a few stories, things that can be made up, after all. He didn't know a single deportee who hadn't come back, and they didn't look like skeletons at all. As for the Jews, they all returned, and got back their jobs, and not the worst jobs by any means. . . . Marcel said nothing. Henri only said there were a lot of people who denied that there had been any Resistance, or any camps, or that anybody had been killed.

The next day, Emile was transferred to the division of "appelés."

Marcel now began to find fault with my gestures, my disorder, and everything I said. ("You're intelligent, but sometimes you talk such —.") If I didn't put away the chessmen, he would throw them and the board

across the cell, though it was perfectly plain that others were going to play after me.

"Good God, when will you get it through your head that you're not all alone here? You treat us like your servants."

Or he would say that if I received permission to have books, it was because I licked the boots of the director, the assistant director, or the examining magistrate, that I was quite a hand at getting along, and that all in all this was not surprising.

Then Milo, who had something else to answer for at Grenoble, left. Marcel was glad ("but not for him").

There were just three of us left: Henri, Marcel, and myself. It was then that they told about their military exploits, and that Henri confided to us what he had done during the occupation, explaining his silence by saying: "There are some people who may not understand everything." Up to the end I got along perfectly with him.

ONE day a new prisoner came in, twenty-two, Polish, a professional burglar. He spoke French with a Parisian accent, and a few mistakes in syntax such as children make. It was plain that he couldn't understand Marcel's open hostility toward me. One day he remarked that he didn't like Jews ("They exploit people in Poland"), and Marcel started a kind of blackmail that only I could understand. I now turned my previous precautions to good account, and spoke to him in veiled terms of the confidence I had put in him, etc. He flew into a violent rage and scoffed at my way of putting things. ("Oh, I'm betraying Monsieur's confidence, am I?") Nevertheless, he never told Jean, the Pole, that I was a Jew. Jean and I remained perfect friends.

Then an Arab arrived: twenty-four, a laborer, arrested by mistake in a raid, speaking hardly any French. We got along very well. When Marcel found out that the Arab didn't like Jews ("A dirty race, the Jews") he made no attempt to blackmail me. He merely remarked once that one of my lawyers was a Jew.

During my last days I was especially cautious. Relations between Marcel and me became more and more strained, and I did everything I could to avoid an explosion. I did everything I could to keep Jean and Ahmed on my side.

One Friday my lawyer came and told me that the examining magistrate, who had just come back from his vacation, was prepared to parole me provided the Court had no objection. On Sunday he came back and told me that it was now only a matter of days, because the Court was raising no difficulties.

On my return I told my cellmates, expressing my confidence that the judge would do as he had said. (He knew my case, he knew me; when he had wanted to hold me, he had told me so; now that he said he was going to set me free, he would surely do it, etc.) I must admit that I displayed my joy and sense of deliverance a little too freely. Marcel reacted violently. What enraged him was that I should be so sure of myself; he knew this judge perfectly well, and no one could ever be sure what he was going to do; he had promised to parole a man and then weeks later had turned him down; why should I, Mr. Nobody, think I was any different from the others, why should I expect him to do me special favors? It was only because I was so stinking arrogant that I could be sure they'd let me out in the course of the week, etc. . . . For a week he exulted, riding me more every day and getting more overbearing as the week passed.

"I'd like you to stay here so it'll be a lesson to you. We'll talk about it again in a month or two. You're just like everybody else, my friend. . . ."

A week passed in this atmosphere. Saturday, at five o'clock, I was summoned to the lawyers' room where I heard that I was being released that evening.

On my return to the cell, I said nothing and went on with the game of chess I had started with Henri. (Even if I had work to do, I couldn't decline to play without offending him.) At about eight, a guard came to get me. Ahmed, Jean, and Henri were sincerely glad for me; Henri only reproached me for not having told him. Marcel had the same pleasure as at Milo's departure ("but not for him"); Jean remarked that the week wasn't over yet and I was leaving. In the doorway, I felt the impatience of the guard standing motionless behind me. I hurriedly took out my pack of cigarettes and held it out to the one who happened to be nearest. It was Marcel. He recoiled, and it was Jean who took the cigarettes.